

The same gospel in diverse ministries (Galatians 2:6–10)

Only one gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). Audiences and messengers differ, the manner of presentation may differ, but the message remains constant. Opponents of Paul claimed he varied his message and/or was dependent upon the other apostles. But Paul's message was divinely revealed, not received from men. And the apostles were united in the content of the message. Having shown that through their united stand against circumcising Titus, Paul again affirms it in a step by step argument for having the same message but diverse ministries.

1. ***Paul rejects any suggestion “those of reputation” authorized him or added to his message (2:6).***

Those who “seemed to be influential” (ESV), or simply “those of reputation”, were James, Peter, and John. The opponents of Paul elevated their importance probably because of their life-experiences with Jesus. However, their experiences were not the basis of their authority and they could add nothing to Paul's message.

 - a. Paul did not regard their background as important, because it was not the basis of their authority. Rather it was God's sovereign choice just as he was chosen to be an apostle.
 - b. These men of reputation did not and could not add to his divinely received message, nor to his authority.
2. ***Paul argues that the same stewardship was evident in both Peter and Paul (2:7).***

Paul presents the reasons James, Peter and John would give him and Barnabas the “right hand of fellowship”: the same stewardship and the same message, though to a different audience.

 - a. The same gospel was entrusted to both Paul and Peter, by which “entrust” implies a stewardship of the gospel given by God (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:14–17; 1 Thessalonians 2:4).
 - b. The same Lord entrusted both Paul and Peter with the same gospel, though with a different focus of ministry: Paul to the “uncircumcised” and Peter to the “circumcised.” (More than just an ethnic difference between Jew and Gentile, these terms nuance the question of the importance of circumcision. Both were to receive the same gospel in which salvation was in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone without any works of the law.)
3. ***The same empowerment in the proclamation of the gospel was evident in both Peter & Paul (2:8).***
 - a. Peter had preached boldly, clearly and authoritatively to the Jews (the circumcised), as at Pentecost.
 - b. Paul as well had proclaimed Christ with much success, but especially among the Gentiles (the uncircumcised) at least in Antioch if not before, and then later on his first missionary journey (cf. Acts 14:27; 15:12).

God worked the same for Peter and for Paul in fulfilling their stewardship, their commissions, one to the circumcised, the other to the uncircumcised. This affirmed for the leadership in Jerusalem that Paul had indeed been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised.
4. ***God's grace was evident in the ministry of Paul (2:9a).***
 - a. God's grace to Paul in this context is His gift to Paul of ministry among the Gentiles as a priestly ministry in which saved Gentiles became an acceptable offering to God (Romans 15:15–16).
 - b. James, Peter and John saw this grace in Paul's life and knew that his proclamation of Christ alone was bringing Gentile believers as an acceptable, Spirit sanctified offering to God.
5. ***The interchange in Jerusalem resulted in a unified though diverse ministry (2:9b–10).***
 - a. Their unity is seen in offering the right hand of fellowship, a recognition that they had been entrusted with the same gospel.
 - b. They also agreed upon diverse ministries, each with a different target audience.
 - c. But the unity of the church was not forgotten, as all agreed to continue help of the poor, probably the impoverished Christians in Judea and Jerusalem.

The gospel must remain constant across all ministries, no matter how diverse. The presentations and the messengers may vary, but the gospel may not. However God calls, the gospel proclaims Christ crucified and salvation in Him alone by grace alone through faith alone.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- Jesus approached different people differently. What is the same and what is different about His interaction with the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18–25) and the man born blind (John 9)?
- Paul testified to governor Felix as summarized in Acts 24:24–25. Why might Paul have picked these points and how might he have elaborated on each?
- Among your friends and acquaintances, how might you need to present the same gospel differently?